

GOD ESTABLISHES THE LEADERS!

(Scripture. Num. 17:8-11)

Numbers 17:8-11. 8Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had sprouted and produced buds and bloomed with blossoms, and it yielded ripe almonds. 9Moses then brought out all the staffs from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his staff. 10But the LORD said to Moses, Put the staff of Aaron back in front of the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, so that you may put an end to their grumbings against Me and they do not die." 11Moses did so; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.

Introduction: We saw last week what happens to people who try to undermine the leader whom God had appointed. The punishment is not only for the rebels, but for his supporters and sympathizers also. When you come across that kind of negativity, nip it in the bud. Don't support such negativity. Many lives were lost. People were in panic mode. At that time, God gave Moses and Aaron the following instruction, and they obeyed.

Numbers 16:39,40. 39So the priest Eleazar took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as plating for the altar, 40as a reminder to the sons of Israel so that no layman, anyone who was not of the descendants of Aaron, would approach to burn incense before the LORD; then he would not become like Korah and his group—just as the LORD had spoken to him through Moses.

Memorials are not for remembering just good things from the Lord. Sometimes, it is erected for remembering the punishment for the bad things they did also so that it can stand as a warning to people that they may not follow the way of Korah.

God had clearly drawn a line where Aaron and his family stands, and where Levites should stand, and where the congregation stands.

Numbers 16:41-43. 41But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD'S people!" 42It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting,

Looks like Israelites were bent on rebelling! They called Korah and the gang as Lord's people, whom the Lord despised and killed them in a horrendous manner. Some people never learn and will never change! They blamed Aaron and Moses for the death of Korah and the two hundred and fifty leaders. People can always twist the truth and accuse the other party. We see this all the time in our modern politics.

Before the crowd could charge after Moses and Aaron, God intervened again. Our God is our fort and our shield. He will shield us from our enemies and protect us. The glory of the Lord appeared, and now Moses and Aaron stood before the tabernacle. Probably they were inside the tabernacle, and now they stepped out in boldness because of God.

Numbers 16:44-46. 44and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 Get away from among this congregation so that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces. 46And Moses said to Aaron, Take your censer and put fire in it from the altar, and place incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the LORD, the plague has begun!”

The Lord was very angry, and He says the same thing again and again, “Get away from among this congregation so that I may consume them instantly.” How often God said these words, but Moses and Aaron stood in the way of God’s judgement and pleaded for mercy. But this time, God ignored their plea, and plague started breaking out. Moses commanded Aaron to take the censer, and put fire on it from the altar, place incense on it, and take it to the congregation. Incense always symbolizes our prayers. Our intercession for others goes like incense before the Lord. Aaron stood between the living and the dead with the censer. We must also do that against the plague of corona virus. Stand between the gap of the living and the dead and save the remaining living beings.

Numbers 16:47-50. 47Then Aaron took it just as Moses had spoken, and he ran into the midst of the assembly; and behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. 48And he took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was brought to a halt. 49But those who died by the plague were 14,700 in number, besides those who died on account of Korah. 50Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been brought to a halt.

Aaron’s action here represents Christ’s action! Christ our Lord, stood between the spiritually dead people and the living, and pleaded for their forgiveness. While we were yet enemies, He died for us. Here we see Aaron trying to save those people who was so angry with him and were ready to kill him. The plague stopped, but not before killing 14,700 people.

Numbers 17:2-5. 2 Speak to the sons of Israel and obtain from them a staff for each father s household: twelve staffs, from all their leaders for their fathers households. You shall write each man s name on his staff, 3and write Aaron s name on the staff of Levi; for there is to be one staff for the head of each of their fathers households. 4You shall then leave them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony, where I meet with you. 5And it will come about that the staff of the man whom I choose will sprout. So, I will relieve Myself of the grumblings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you.”

God wanted to put away this rivalry among the tribes for good! He wanted to show clearly who will be the ultimate leader among them!

Numbers 17: 6,7. 6So Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a staff, one for each leader, for their fathers households, twelve staffs in all, with the staff of Aaron among their staffs. 7Then Moses left the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

The leader of every tribe brought the staff to Moses. Aaron's staff also was gathered. We are not sure if Aaron's staff was one among the 12 staffs or the thirteenth staff. Most probably, it was the thirteenth staff because his high priest office was a special position, directly representing God. He was never portrayed as the ruler or prince of Levi tribe.

But Levi tribe was not supposed to be included in the census, and they were chosen to be the servants around the Lord's tabernacle. So if you consider Joseph's two children, Ephraim and Manasseh as full tribes, the Israelites will have 12 tribes without Levis.

So, Moses took 12 or 13 staffs inside the tabernacle and laid it in front of the ark of the covenant.

Numbers 17: 8-11 8Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, Aaron s staff for the house of Levi had sprouted and produced buds and bloomed with blossoms, and it yielded ripe almonds. 9Moses then brought out all the staffs from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his staff. 10But the LORD said to Moses, Put the staff of Aaron back in front of the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, so that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me and they do not die." 11Moses did so; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.

The next day, when Moses entered the tabernacle, he had a real surprise waiting for him! Aaron's staff that represented Levi tribe as the 13th? had sprouted, blossomed, flowered, and yielded ripe almonds, all in one day! Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Can any believer go hungry? God was feeding these Israelites day after day. He fed Elijah through ravens! God can save you and provide you. He can heal you. But sometimes things don't happen for us because He allows those sufferings to build the pearl of faith and character within us just like the oyster builds the pearl because of the irritation of sand within them! Count it all joy when you are in the hands of God. All things will work out for good for those who love God! We know this verse, but refuse to believe it when suffering hits us.

All the tribe leaders took their staff back. They must have been stunned to see a real almond tree in Aaron's staff. I am sure, great fear must have struck them. They must have realized that it is a grave error to challenge God's anointed! Whom God has established as a leader, no man should try to undermine and turn people against him.

God told Moses to take back Aaron's staff back in front of the Testimony as a memorial. This is "to be kept as a sign against the rebels, so that you may put an end to their grumblings against God". God is very particular about memorializing events, good or bad, so that it can serve us as a warning. If the rebels ever try again, all Moses had to do is to show this almond tree staff! Amazing God! A live almond tree without any roots! God could pluck out Israel and bring out another generation just like that. (Romans 9,10,11).

Numbers 17:12, 13. 12Then the sons of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, Behold, we are passing away, we are perishing, we are all perishing! 13Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, must die. Are we to perish completely?"

Now the real fear hits the rebels. They ask a very open-ended question here. The answer was a resounding yes. But it happened within these forty years of wilderness. None of the rebels entered the promised land. They all perished in the wilderness as they had prophesied about themselves.

Just like in Korah's case, this rebellion was highly unnecessary. There was no reason to raise against God's anointed.

What can we learn from this story?

1. God will plead for His anointed!
If you attack the leader, you attack God, and He will come after you.
2. God clearly defines and draws the lines of responsibility. Stay within that boundary.
3. God can do anything! He can raise a new generation without any history or tradition. He can bring a plant without any roots. Is anything too hard for the Lord?
4. Memorialize everything, the good, the bad, and the ugly!

Forget not His benefits in your life!

Psalm 103:1,2. Bless the Lord, o my soul, and all that is within me.

Bless the Lord, o my soul, forget not all His benefits!

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